BATMAN AND THE JOKER © DC COMICS, INC.

BATMAN

When Jim Steranko interviewed Bill Finger for his 1970 **HISTORY OF THE COMICS**, Finger told him he got the idea for Batman from the movie, **THE BAT**, which he had seen recently. Bob Kane, who drew the comic book stories, went along with this. Finger was the writer, the man interested in pulp fiction, the guy who did the reading and research. Had Steranko gone a little further with his inquiries, he would have discovered quite a different picture. First off, he would have found that Finger's most immediate source for the shadowy Batman was Walter B. Gibson's character, **THE SHADOW**.

The concept of a shadowy costumed bat man which lead to both Gibson's Shadow and Finger and Kane's Batman came from **THE BAT**, the 1920 Broadway version of Mary Roberts Rinehart's first novel, **THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE**, which began her writing career when it was serialized in **ALL STORY MAGAZINE** from November of 1907 to March of 1908 (v. IX, No. 3). Bobbs-Merrill published **STAIRCASE** in book form in 1908, The Selig Company filmed it in 1915 as a 5 reel silent, and it was reprinted in **MARY ROBERTS RINEHART'S MYSTERY BOOK** in 1930. Rinehart began writing when she was 27, and **STAIRCASE** was *"intended to be a semi-satire on the usual pompous self-important crime story (261)*," but critics and the public took it seriously, so Rinehart accepted the inevitable. She began to dramatize the story in 1917, but was interrupted by the war. In 1918, she returned to the script, working on it while she stayed at the Langton Hotel in New York. *"It was at this time that I decided to invent a master criminal to be called The Bat, and to have the action of the play all occur during one night* (264)."

Rinehart met playright Avery Hopwood in New York and asked him to finish **The Bat**. He was busy, but by March 20 had found time to work out the details of the third act and **The Bat** was ready for the stage. It was produced by Wagenhals and Kemper and opened August 23, 1920, at the Morosco Theater in New York with Harrison Hunter playing the Bat. Hunter died during the run of the play, which was called **A THIEF IN THE NIGHT** when it played Washington, D. C. **THE BAT** was a hit and by 1926, it had been published as a novel by George H. Doran. Dell did the paperback.

United Artists filmed it silent in 1926 as **THE BAT**, then did a sequel, **THE BAT WHISPERS** in 1931. It was remade in color in 1958 with Vincent Price as The Bat.

The idea of a bat man as a vampiric demonic night creature came from Transylvanian folk lore. Rinehart was probably influenced by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's story *Carmilla* from **IN A GLASS DARKLY** (1872) by way of Abraham [Bram] Stoker's 1897 novel, **DRACULA**, though it is quite possible she was familiar with **VARNEY THE VAMPIRE** (1859) or even with **THE VAMPYR** (Pierre Carmouche, Paris, 1920). The idea of a bat creature flitting in and out of a country house in the dark of night to threaten women is retained in **THE BAT**, but the vampirism is dropped in favor of a money motive. **THE CIRCULAR STAIRCASE** was a first person ghost story told by elderly Rachel Innes. Her quest for independence through renting a summer house with her nephew and niece forms the core of the story. As Cordelia in **THE BAT**, she remains a strong character, but the integrity of the story is compromised by the addition of The Bat, who is superimposed upon what *was* a tightly structured plot involving a corrupt banker and his nephew. The Bat takes the story too far into the realm of the absurd. We're expected to believe he would even carry live bats on his

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person since he leaves a dead one as his calling card. A burglar is going to carry bats around in his pockets?

Walter Gibson adapted The Bat and turned him into The Shadow who was in turn adapted by Kane and Finger into the comic book Batman. Finger saw the 1926 *film* of **THE BAT** and the *image* of the character stuck in his mind, but he got the *details* used in the comic book stories from Gibson's pulp Shadow stories which he had been reading and hearing on the radio for nearly a decade before he sat down to write The Batman.

The concept of an wealthy aristocrat with a double identity probably came from Baroness Orczy's **THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL**, which resulted from a collaboration with her husband, Montague Barstow, and was onstage in London in 1903, novelized by 1905, and filmed in America in 1934. The Pimpernel was Sir Percy Blakeney, who outwitted adversaries like Chauvelin through superior courage and ingenious disguises, all of the time concealing his night time identity from his aristocratic friends as Bruce Wayne would do several decades later.

In **THE SHADOW SCRAPBOOK**, Walter Gibson explains how he developed the character of The Shadow, using Horatio Alger, Jr.'s **RISEN FROM THE RANKS** or **HARRY WALTON'S SUCCESS** (1874) as a model for the first novel. The Alger book had 36 chapters, each 9 pages long, and each with a descriptive line. This worked out to about 75,000 words. Gibson called his first story **THE LIVING SHADOW** and Street and Smith published it in April of 1931. "It introduced the Shadow as a somewhat nebulous figure who moved in and out of the story in such an uncanny fashion that people who encountered him--be they friend or foe--automatically spoke of him as 'The Shadow.' When he did assume a solid form, it was that of a cloaked fighter striking down and scattering men of evil, while at other times he appeared in an unexpected disguise, rescuing friends and agents from seemingly hopeless situations. On such occasions crooks often mistook him for one of themselves or even for their leader, so adept was The Shadow in the art of quick change and make-up (6)." In **THE EYES OF THE SHADOW** (July, 1931), Gibson made his hero a millionaire and gave him "a tower room equipped with all the latest radio gadgets, including some that were not yet invented (6)." The name Cranston came from Houdini's old magic files. Gibson had ghosted a book on the magician. Lamont was a family name from the New York Telephone Directory. The Shadow was on the radio by July 1, 1930, on the Detective Story Hour, sponsored by Street and Smith, which means the character was familiar to a mass audience *before* he appeared in the April 1931 pulp. While Gibson gave credit to Alger for the format he used, he did not credit Rinehart as an immediate source anymore than Finger credited Gibson.

THE LIVING SHADOW is almost a carbon copy of **THE BAT.** Here is the way Rinehart first mentions her character: "Beast, man, or devil? A specter--a flying shadow--*The shadow* of a bat (8)." Again: "The Bat . . . like a bat he chose the night hours for his work of rapine; like a bat he struck and vanished, pouncing noiselessly; like a bat he never showed himself to the face of the day (8)." en fin, "Evil's four hundred chattered, discussed, debated--sent out a thousand invisible tentacles to clutch at a shadow--to turn this shadow and its distorted genius to their own ends (9)." I expect Gibson and Finger were more influenced by **THE BAT** (1926) and **THE BAT WHISPERS** (1931) than the novel, but the connection is clear in either case.

Rinehart even foresaw the faddist possibilities for her character, predicting what would happen to Batman in 1966 when a television show would make him high camp. She wrote in 1926: "Ministers mentioned him in sermons: cranks wrote fanatic letters denouncing him as one of the seven-headed beasts of the Apocalypse, and a forerunner of the end of the world: a popular revue put on a special Bat number wherein eighteen beautiful chorus girls appeared Masked and black-winged in costumes of Brazilian bat fur; there were Bat Club sandwiches, Bat Cigarettes, and a new shade of hosiery called simply and succinctly BAT. He became a fad--a catchword--a national figure. And yet--he was walking Death--cold remorseless. But Death itself had become a toy of publicity (10)."

Rinehart saw her Bat man as a rather romantic figure. The idea of a double identity appeals to a woman, perhaps more than to a man, who has power and status in his own professional life. In her time, women remained in service positions at the very bottom of the corporate ladder. It's only logical to expect women forced to serve to harbor fantasy identities in which they are free to do as they please with their lives. One imagines the Baroness Orczy riding to the rescue on the night wind as The Scarlet Pimpernel. In **THE BAT**, Mary Roberts Rinehart devises a way to have her cake and eat it, too. Her heroine is a wealthy woman who rents a summer house. She receives threatening letters designed to get her to leave, because someone believes the money from a bank robbery has been hidden in the house. She refuses to leave, but invites a detective named Anderson to stay in the house and investigate the threats. Anderson, who works with Chief John Grogan as Bruce Wayne will later work with Commisioner Gordon, wants to go after the Bat because the Bat has killed his friend Wentworth, hence his motive is revenge like that of Finger's Bruce Wayne whose parents were killed by a thief. In the end, the man Cornelia assumed to be Anderson turned out to be the Bat. He had ambushed the real Anderson and tied him up. Throughout the plot, however, it is this 65-year-old woman who thinks it all out and stays ahead of the ingenious Bat. She is the one who triumphs in the end as he is taken off in handcuffs.

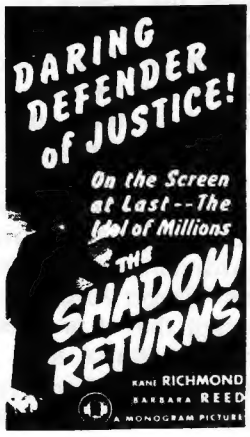
Rinehart and Hopwood simply extended Stoker's **DRACULA**. Logically, the Count would have to be a member of the underworld, one who lived by night. He could not acquire the blood he required for survival in any legal manner, so he had to kill people in order to get it. So the Count became the Prince of Darkness, a shadowy night figure, a projection of the dark side of nature.

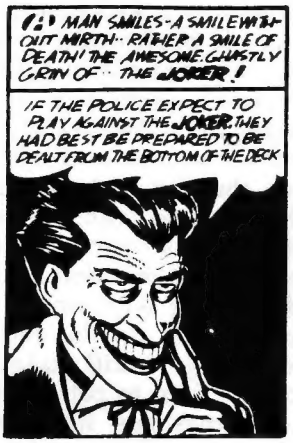
As for the detection, Rinehart gives credit to her literary influences, Arthur Conan Doyle and Alexandre Dumas, but from her reference to William Gillette, it is likely she was influenced more by *his* performance on Broadway as Sherlock Holmes than by any re-reading of Conan Doyle's work. Holmes began his career in 1887 in **A STUDY IN SCARLET** and few mystery writers have not been influenced by the tight prose and clear logic of Doyle. Cornelia's logical deductions are pure Holmes.

Walter B. Gibson.

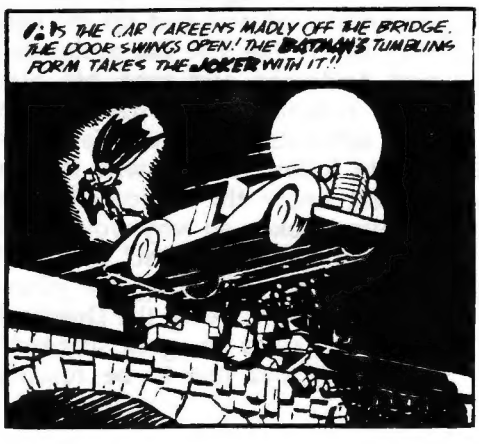
What Bill Finger did was to take the masked nocturnal avenger and the detective and fuse them into a single character. Instead of being a manifestation of evil, the Batman would fight against evil, but, in truth, Finger swiped a lot of things from Rinehart, and Gibson without giving them any credit. Rinehart used the calling card and the bat signal, to give you a couple of examples. "Look at the way he leaves his calling card after every job--a black paper bat--a bat drawn on the wall with a burnt match (11)." Here is the way she described the bat signal: "...suddenly, travelling swiftly from right to left across the shades of the French windows, there appeared a glowing circle of brilliant white light. Inside the circle was a black, distorted shadow--a shadow like the shadow of a gigantic black bat! It was there--then a second later, it was gone!"

Let's have a little fun and look at one of the early Batman stories logically. We'll use the debut of The Joker. As it begins, The Joker is announcing over the radio that certain rich men will die at midnight and The Joker will steal one of their valuable treasures. If you whiz through the story without giving it much thought, it's all right, but the slightest reflection on the story and art tears it to shreds. We see an elderly couple listening as The Joker states his plan. How did The Joker get access to that radio transmission? Where did he learn about electronics? The listener assumes the message is a joke since Orson Welles had recently pulled the same kind of gag on the public when he dramatized an Invasion from Mars on the Mercury Theater in 1938. Next panel, we find that radio stations have been swamped with calls. Why? The population isn't threatened. What would the average radio listener care about some rich man's jewelry? Nothing. The millionaire calls the police. Twelve officers surround him at midnight, but he dies anyway. In reality, some tired desk sergeant would have taken the call, logged it in his book, and dismissed it as just another of hundreds of crank calls the New York police get every day. We know that Batman's Gotham is actually New York, because Finger told Steranko. The dead plutocrat has The Joker's grin on his face. Cute, but very unlikely. If there is a poison that acts in that manner, it is only known to Bill Finger. The diamond found in the safe is glass, indicating that The Joker has already been there and switched the gems. How did he get access to the house? How did he get the combination to the safe? What kind of chemical




A MAN SMILES-A SMILE WITHOUT MIRTH-- RATHER A SMILE OF DEATH! THE AWESOME GHASTLY GRIN OF THE JOKER!
IF THE POLICE EXPECT TO PLAY AGAINST THE JOKER, THEY HAD BEST BE PREPARED TO BE DEALT FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE DECK

NEWSPAPERS, RADIOS ALL SCREAM THE STORY OF THE RUTHLESS, CUNNING CRIMINAL, THE JOKER! AT HOME BRUCE WAYNE, THE BATMAN, SPEAKS WITH HIS YOUNG AID, DICK GRAYSON, KNOWN AS ROBIN, THE BOY WONDER!
BUT BRUCE, WHY DON'T WE TAKE A SHOT AT THIS JOKER GUY?
NOT YET, DICK. THE TIME ISN'T RIPE. BUT WHEN WE DO ...



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could be injected in someone that would kill him in exactly 24 hours? How did The Joker get near the criminal to inject him? How did he time it so he would inject him exactly 24 hours earlier? Finger has the newspapers and radio stations screaming about The Joker. After one crime? In New York in the thirties when gangster killings were an everyday event? The routine is repeated a second time, same circle of cops, same result. I guess Finger thought the cops had nothing to do but assign half a shift to sit around some millionaire's living room all evening. Where the millionaire's own private bodyguards are is a good question.

The second millionaire dies and gas fills the room. The Joker has been hiding in a suit of armor. He killed the millionaire with a blown dart, then gassed the cops with a gas gun swiped from the Green Hornet radio show. But what is this gas and how did The Joker get it and how did he manage to get into the man's house and dress himself in that suit of armor without anyone knowing about it? Where were the rich man's servants? In the thirties, he would have had a couple of dozen, including maids, butlers, gardeners, a chauffeur--where is everyone? Finger forgot about them. He also forgot that it is impossible for anyone to put on a suit of armor without help. The Medieval knights who wore such armor always had help from their pages. The noise of that armor would have awakened everyone in the house. So here is The Joker with a gas gun in his hand, the room full of knocked-out cops, and he's not wearing a gas mask! Where did he get those immune lungs? What is this "venom spray"? It's not hard to figure out that Finger sat and listened to the radio as he put together his story and he just copied down what he heard the way today's comic book writers copy down what they see on the tube in front of them. Why bother to think?

After the first murder, Dick Grayson [Robin] suggests they go after The Joker, but Batman says the time isn't ripe? Why not? Why does he wait until someone else is killed? Brute Nelson, a stereotyped B-movie gangster decides to get The Joker, because the laughing man is cutting in on his action. Batman hears about this over the Grapevine and heads for Brute's house. Talk about coincidences. The Joker shows up at Brute's at the same time as Batman. He comes in a downstairs window as the Caped Crusader appears at the top of the stairs. How did he get up there? Did he fly in an upstairs window? Was he using the Batgiro swiped from The Shadow? Batman jumps headlong down the stairs into three crooks. Strangely enough, his momentum doesn't carry all of them across the room into a pile against a far wall. What follows is a series of panels unrelated to any credible choreography. Bob Kane never thought his art out at all. Here is The Joker with his left leg out the window and he's casually shooting Brute with a gun held in his left hand. The Joker isn't holding on to anything! Just why Brute didn't shoot the clumsy Joker is a mystery, since he has his gun in his hand. Batman chases The Joker and jumps on the back of his moving car. In a second panel he is standing on what would have been the running board [cars still had these carriage leftovers in the thirties] if Kane had remembered to draw it. As it is, he is standing on nothing. The Joker, driving a speeding car now, tries to shoot Batman with the gun in his right hand. Batman holds on to the door with his left hand and grabs The Joker's wrist with his right. The car crashes through a solid stone railing and goes off a bridge as the two characters leap out on the passenger side. Amazing. How did they get over there when they were fighting on the other side of the car seconds before? How did that car get through that stone railing? How could it have been driven straight into the side of the bridge? Batman and The Joker do not hit the pavement and wind up in intensive care with concussions. This is the comic book world here. In the next panel, Joker is punching Batman with a left hook. Next he kicks him off the bridge into the water, so Batman, human like you and me, drowns and that's the end of him, huh? Not a bit of it. The cold water revives "the dark knight" and a couple of panels later he is back in his mansion smoking his pipe and chatting with Robin. The Joker is already back on the radio, this time threatening to kill Judge Drake who once sent him to prison. This time The Joker comes and hangs out with the judge in the disguise of a Police Chief. He ambushed and tied up the real one very much like The Bat ambushed the real Anderson and took his place in Mary Rinehart's **THE BAT**. Robin has been left outside the judge's house and told to follow anyone who left, but he doesn't know the Police Chief is the disguised Joker, so why would he leave his post to follow him? He wouldn't. But he does, following the Joker to a deserted house. Being the Dumbo he is, he walks right in, gets slugged over the head, and has to be rescued by Batman who is following in his footsteps. The wise one has coated Robin's shoes with a luminous material that shows up under an infra-red flashlight Batman carries with him. The Joker has casually changed clothes between panels and is about to inject Robin when Batman crashes through the window. Without slashing his face to ribbons on the glass, Batman grabs the hand with the shringe and slugs The Joker. Joker falls against a table filled with chemicals and an "electrical flame" starts a fire. Finger says there is a blast. Joker grabs for his gas gun and lets Batman have it. He claims to have injected himself with an antidote and is immune to the gas. The Joker leaves. Well, gimme a break here, guys. The blast in such close quarters would have killed everyone and the flames would have burned them all to putrescent slime in a few minutes, leaving nothing but charred meat in that old house, but Batman just slings old Robin over his shoulder and strolls outside. The problem here is that Finger and Kane were really doing Superman, not Batman. They *said* he was a human, vulnerable like everyone else, then they proceeded to write and draw him doing humanly impossible things.

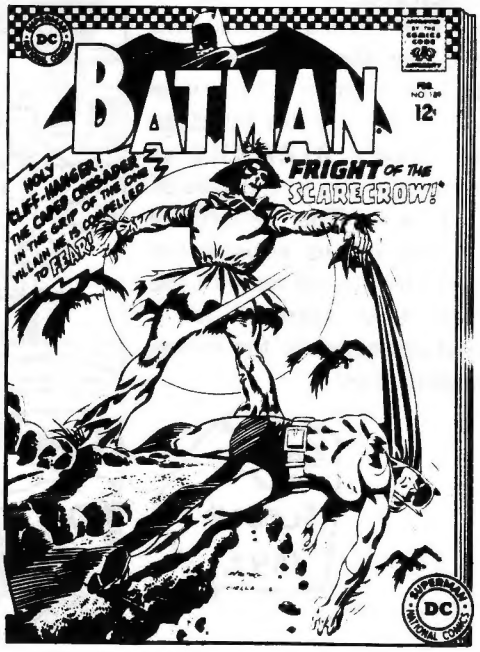
No one thinks to call the fire department. No thought that innocent people might be in the area, that the burning house might be a danger. Batman and Robin just race off after The Joker who is into his next crime. They were all on foot, but next panel we find The Joker outside a penthouse at the top of a building. The dynamic duo jump over from the girders of a building next door, just in time to encounter The Joker. Boy, these guys have durability. Where did the Joker get *his* superpowers. One would think he would be in a hospital ward on chemo-therapy, rather than out killing millionaires and collecting jewelry.

Joker fires his pistol at Batman, but surprise, Batman is wearing a bulletproof vest! Bullet proofed vests are extremely heavy and the wearer has little agility, but we won't worry our hero about that. The Joker jumps to the uncompleted building next door in his attempt to escape, but Robin is waiting. The Boy Wonder falls on his back and kicks The Joker in the jaw. The Joker falls over the side, but Batman catches him with one arm (Hey, this is Finger's writing.), drags him up into the penthouse patio, bats him with a left hook and next panel's newspaper headline proclaims **BATMAN CAPTURES JOKER**. At the end, Joker is behind bars planning his

escape. We still have no name for him, no background. All we know is that he was in prison. Finger knew nothing of actual police work. Batman is action for its own sake.

As Batman continued, the artwork improved, though panel logic remained as absurd as detailed here. The villains, imitated from those of Chester Gould's **DICK TRACY**, were always gimmick and image-oriented. The result was the same whether Dick chased Mumbles or Batman chased Two-Face Dent. The Joker's origin was told in **THE MAN BEHIND THE HOOD** in 1952. He was a worker in a chemical laboratory and he tired of his daily work so he decided to steal a million dollars in one grand robbery and retire. He escaped with the money by swimming through a pool contaminated with chemical waste and when he got home he found his hair had turned green and his skin chalk white and his lips bright red. Of course, he wasn't the least bit sick from his experience and didn't even consult a doctor. The Joker was inspired by a movie version of Victor Hugo's **THE MAN WHO LAUGHS** (1928), which starred Conrad Veidt.

You're not supposed to think about a comic book story. It's that simple. It's all action and it goes by in seconds. If you look closely at the panels and consider the art in relation to what is said and think about the realistic possibilities of what you are being asked to believe, you'll have a rough time accepting comic book writing at all. Batman and Robin and their peers would be long dead in a real world and before that they would have been complete physical wrecks, toothless masses of broken bones and scar tissue. Cartoonists can't have it both ways. Batman is either human or not and if he is, he has to be treated accordingly, not put in situations where he walks through a gas fire unburned or catches a falling body with one hand. **BATMAN** degenerated in the fifties. What could be more stupid than putting a bat mask on a dog and calling him Bat Hound? Well, in case you think the idea died, you probably missed those two episodes of **THE BIONIC WOMAN** where Jamie Summers was assisted by her Bionic German Shepherd. The worse an idea is, the more likely you are to see it repeated on television several times in your lifetime.


BATMAN
12¢
HOLY CLIFF-HANGER! THE CURSE CRUSADER IN THE GRIP OF THE ONE VILLAIN HE IS POWERLESS TO FIGHT!
FRIGHT OF THE SCARECROW!
DC

Was there any significant change when the Joker story I have analyzed was combined by Alan Moore and artist Brian Bolland with the 1952 **RED HOOD** tale to become **THE KILLING JOKE** (1988)? We are now post spaghetti western, hence graphic violence is de rigeur, because the writers and artists have forgotten that tragic events were intensified in Greek tragedy *because* they took place offstage. Today's artist would have his camera-eye in close-up as Oedipus tore out his eyes. This, coupled with rear nudity and an occasional breast, is considered adult fare, but what is adult about rubbing the reader's nose in a violent event like the shooting of Police Commisioner Gordon's daughter, Barbara? Where Bolland's art is as professional and precise as Kane's early drawing was amateurish and careless, the story remains a basic revenge tragedy. Batman's mystique is preserved and he is as absurd a figure in 1988 as he was in 1939. Though he still cannot fly, Bolland has him flying down out of the sky just as Kane did, a Superman in bat cape and cowl. When the Joker shoots Barbara Gordon as part of his revenge against her father, *she suffers for several panels, yet Batman hits Joker in the jaw and he doesn't even bleed.* Moore's technique is to amplify the old formula, to make the villain quintessentially evil so the reader will be satisfied when he gets it in the end, but at the same time Moore grafts a psychological plot into this bondage story showing the Joker's home life and the original reason for his shift to a life of crime.

Moore is out to rationalize evil via psychoanalysis as he did in his **WATCHMEN** series. His Joker is still the chemical lab worker who escapes via the card factory, but he is also a man trying to make it as a stand-up comic, a composite of of Mort Sahl and Lenny Bruce. Joker was forced to commit his crime by others. He would have been a nice guy, but bad people pushed him into crime. His ultimate madness results from his reflection upon the state of the world. The Moore thesis is that *madness is the only plausible response in an irrational psychotic world.* Moore sends Batman to the Arkham Asylum for the Criminally Insane to talk things over with The Joker. Problem is, the Joker has already escaped, using a doppelganger in white-face to cover for him. Batman's subsequent search for him is paralleled by flashbacks to the villain's early life, interspersed with his

CONCEALED IN THE DARK SHADOWS OF THE ROOM, BATMAN AND ROBIN STARE AT EACH OTHER IN INCREASING DISMAY...
HOLY INTERFERENCE! SHE'S RUINING ALL OUR PLANS! BESIDES--SHE MAKES TERRIBLE PUNS!
STILL--WE CAN'T LET BATGIRL FIGHT OUR BATTLES, NOW CAN WE?

present revenge scheme which includes shooting Barbara Gordon, kidnapping the Commissioner, and torturing the man by riding him through a tunnel of hate as he projects giant blow-ups of a nude Barbara in pain. Just where The Joker found his freaks, his bald pygmies in panties and stockings, his fat woman, is anyone's guess. These Barnum characters would be long dead, and were they living they would be unlikely to deal with a psycho like The Joker. What interest would they have in torturing Gordon? But we are not supposed to ask rational questions of this story any more than we were of the earlier one by Finger and Kane. Moore and Bolland simply do the Joker against the background of Westworld and the abandoned amusement park used in the recent film of **SUPERGIRL**. It's a Coney Island of the mind with The Joker doing his Lenny Bruce routine on giant television screens. On the one hand, Moore is trying to make credible, via psychology and sociology a couple of cardboard comic characters from the pulp era, but his effort is negated by the absurdity of the situation. The Joker is using madness as a personal weapon against a world that has drifted into psychosis, and Batman is just old Gary Cooper from **HIGH NOON**. *Let's talk things over, Joker, and try to avoid the bloodshed.* We know from the beginning that this is a comic book fantasy a la 1988 and violence is the only acceptable answer to any conflict. That any comic fan would accept Batman and The Joker shaking hands and walking off into the sunset is the real killing joke.

By 1988, the woman is just as much a victim as she was in the late thirties when she was shown in jeopardy on every issue of every Jungle and mystery pulp run off by Street and Smith, but there is a significant difference between then and now. In 1938, we would have seen the raised knife, the threat; in 1988, we see the slashing, the bloodshed, the kind of torture which was reserved for the under-the-counter bondage magazines. Irving Klaw's **BIZARRE** or **EXOTIQUE** pale in comparison to the gore of **THE KILLING JOKE**. The fetishistic sado-masochism designed to satisfy the economic and sexually frustrated male of the depression thirties now appears in a magazine considered appropriate for young children. How the time flies!

WOMEN IN BATMAN 1970's

SALLY THE SLEUTH 1942

SALLY THE SLEUTH
HERE'S DR. LASSITER. I HOPE WE'RE NOT TOO LATE!
THE — SETEP — SCARAB...!!
THE GREAT EGYPTOLOGIST IS DEAD - MURDERED - AND OUR ONLY CLUE IS THE "SETEP SCARAB"
JUST ONE THIEF DEALS IN THAT SORT OF THING. WE MUST FIND SCHNEIDER
FOUR MONTHS - AND AT LAST HE IS TRYING TO GET RID OF THE SCARAB. WHEN SCHNEIDER COMES, YOU GET IN THROUGH A SECOND STORY WINDOW
OKAY, CHIEF. HUSH - HERE COMES SOMEONE!
MY, IT'S DARK!
FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, WHAT'S THIS?!!
OH PRINCESS, AT LAST YOU HAVE ARRIVED FROM THE EAST. I HAVE THE FAMOUS 'SETEP SCARAB' FOR YOU
MY SENSES TELL ME THAT AN INTRUDER IS IN THE HOUSE. QUICK - CLOSE ALL THE EXITS!

The Scarab Murder
THESE BUTTONS CONTROL EFERY DOOR AND WINDOW
I'M TRAPPED!
SPYING, EH?!
I AM PRINCESS HOTEPSU, LONE DESCENDANT OF THE PHARAOHS. THESE MEN OF MY BODYGUARD WILL KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH YOU, YOU LITTLE FOOL!!
WELL, YOU HAVE ME. WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
TAKE HER TO THE DUNGEON AND INVENT AN AMUSING WAY OF REMOVING HER FROM THE EARTH
AYE, PRINCESS
WHO IS THAT? SIEZE THAT MAN!
ALL RIGHT, BOYS. TIE UP SCHNEIDER AND MAMIE KOPF, THE 'PRINCESS'
BUT, CHIEF, I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT AT ALL
OH, MAMIE IS A DERANGED, WEALTHY WOMAN WHO HAS A BUG ON RE-INCARNATION. SHE EVEN FOOLED SCHNEIDER. I HAD A HUNCH, SO FOR WEEKS, HER BODYGUARD WAS MADE UP OF MY MEN.

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How do you deal with women in a mic book? In 1956, Batwoman ppeared. She wore a skintight ostume not unlike that worn by MISS URY in Tarpe Mills' newspaper strip, nd her story was a carbon copy of HANTOM LADY. Batwoman was athy Kane, a bored socialite who urned to nocturnal crime fighting for ecreation. An ex-Circus star like Robin, he decided to compete with Batman, o she got herself a costume and a Bat-Cycle, found an old abandoned ave where she could hide her stuff, a ve very much like the one where HE BLACK WHIP hid her horse in he forties serial. Batwoman got the est of Batman a number of times and is response was not to welcome her as n equal, a fellow crime stopper, no, is response was typically male auvinist protectivist. He set out to ind out her real identity and when he vas able to do this he told her it was oo dangerous for her to continue her areer. If *he* could find out who she vas, others could, too. So what? The me was true for the old Bat sexist. Her giving in and quitting lacked redibility. She was revived, of course, ut the comic book world was still a nale enclave and Batwoman was cheesecake, good for a novelty adventure here or there, but never taken seriously or developed as a possible title. By 1960, DC even married Batman to Batwoman in an imaginary story written by Wayne's butler, Alfred. In 1961, the whole schtick was repeated with Batgirl, who was Kathy Kane's niece, Betty. These women characters were and continue to be ornamental, dressed in impractical skin tight costumes to give the stories in which they appear an erotic flavor designed to appeal to the teenaged male reader. Batman drifted into Science-fiction and imaginary adventures in the fifties for the same reason Superman did. The character was exhausted and the company was willing to do whatever was necessary to keep him going because the money was really coming in from licensed products. That's why we got stories like **BAT-MITE MEETS MR. MXYZTPLK**, Bat-Mite being a little character from the Fourth Dimension a la Mr. Mxyztplk, a magical adversary of Superman.

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When Frank Miller worked on Batman, reviving the image of the Dark Knight, he went back to Rinehart's conception, whether he realized it or not. She said of the Bat: "He may be honored in his community by day...and at night, a bloodthirsty assassin (12)." Finger's motivation for Batman came from Chester Gould's Dick Tracy. In the first Batman story published in **Detective Comics 27** in May of 1939, young Bruce Wayne witnesses the murder of his parents by a robber and he vows to spend his life getting revenge against criminals. Dick Tracy saw the murder of Mr. Truehart and spent his life in law enforcement as a result.

One thing the reader should consider at this point is that the people working in comics have taken plagiarism for granted since the beginning. Many of the comic pioneers were artists first and writers second. They were not educated people, indeed, their reaction was usually to make fun of the educated, casting them as mad scientists and absurd villains. Hence when we are dealing with the first wave of comic books in the thirties we are talking about material most of which was swiped from pulp magazines, novels, and movies. As soon as enough comic books were on the stands, they became a source for constant plagiarism. Jules Feiffer included an entire chapter in **THE GREAT SUPER HEROES** (1965) just talking about the subject. The younger artists would show one another their swipes and their swipe files and later when they had become successful in the business, they would deny that they swiped, no matter how many second-hand Alex Raymond and Hal Foster panels one might point out in their stories. Art is different from writing. When an artist draws his conception of something, be it a tree or Batman, he feels the art belongs to him, that it *is* him. Some people can sit at their traceboards and argue that the panel they just traced from Steranko or Kirby is *their* work. When William Wallace Denslow illustrated the characters in **THE WONDERFUL WIZARD OF OZ**, he was drawing characters that had been created by Lyman Frank Baum, but after drawing the characters he felt they belonged to him and that he could do anything he wanted with them. He and Baum shared the copyright, but when Denslow did his strip on the Scarecrow and Tin Woodman in 1904, he gave no credit to Baum. After all, it was *his* art, not Baum's. When Baum worked on the musical adaptation in 1902, he didn't see why Denslow should share in the profits since he was doing very little work on the production. Writer and artist went their separate ways, and all of the other Baum Oz books were illustrated by John Rea Neill, who was hired by the publisher and had no share in the copyright.

The comic book Batman was second banana to Superman who had become a success in **ACTION COMICS 1** (June, 1938), and he always would be. He was a human being. A rich guy with fancy underwear and a lot of gimmicks. That fight in **THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS** (1986) where Batman and Superman spend a lot of time punching each other was totally ridiculous. Superman is an extra-terrestial, an invulnerable being who can't be hurt. One of his punches would have turned Batman's jawbone to powder. Using the video techniques a la Howard Chaykin's **AMERICAN FLAGG**, Miller has a shrink on Merv psychoanalyze Batman: "Batman's psychotic sublimative psycho-erotic behavior pattern is like a net. Weak-egoed neurotics like Harvey (Two-Face) are drawn into corresponding intersticing patterns. You might say Batman commits the crimes..using his so-called villains as narcissistic proxies (39)." You might also say the writers and artists commit the crimes in comic books using the characters as proxies. Miller casts

Batman as a ruthless vigilante in modern New York where justice has evolved in favor of the criminals. In one scene he throws a crippled criminal out a window onto a fire escape and watches as the man bleeds. Miller's Bruce Wayne is a lonely aging man, still angry and vengeful. He has a girl train to be the new Robin. Miller's Batman is deadly serious stuff. None of the old Jerry Robinson/Mort Weisinger humor is left. No sixties camp. No escapist fantasy here. In the forties, Batman helped us get away from reality. Miller rubs our noses in all of the aberrations of contemporary city life. His influences and swipes are apparent. Panel layouts inspired by Neal Adams. Sound over panels a la Harvey Kurtzman's **BLAZING COMBAT**. Mindless mutant gangs which are complete stereotypes, collective horror without individuation. A cloaking device from Star Trek. A shoot out with Jerry Robinson's Joker in a hall of mirrors from Ian Fleming's **THE MAN WITH THE GOLDEN GUN**. Miller's **DARK KNIGHT** moves from the dramatically powerful and emotionally credible to the ridiculous. His conception of Batman is ultimately that of a supernatural being, not the human being originally conceived by Finger and Kane. His **DARK KNIGHT** reads like an imaginary novel from the fifties cast in the atmosphere of the eighties as seen by the makers of films like **DEATH WISH** and **ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK** and **ROAD WARRIOR.**

In the 1987 graphic novel, **BATMAN, SON OF THE DEMON,** Mike Barr grafts a Batman plot on an Ian Fleming story. He has Batman in love with Talia, even married to her. Talia has a child by Batman, but lies to him and says she has lost the baby. Later she gives it to an orphanage. A normal life and fatherhood are to be denied Bruce Wayne. Can't be out there fighting terrorists and mad scientists out to rule the world if you have to spend the evenings at home reading fairy tales to the kids. Jerry Bingham drew the story in which Talia's father, Al Ghul, is opposed by Qayin. Though Batman is given human feelings, he is still projected as the supernatural being from **THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS**. I think these writers and artists who work with Barman have a hard time making up their minds about the character. *Either he is a vulnerable human being or he isn't.* They continually show Batman doing things a human being could not do. He could not fly around on top of buildings, nor could he win battles against superhuman extra-terrestrials like Superman, nor could he magically know where crimes were taking place and always show up just on time. A bullet in the shoulder is a bullet in the shoulder and the victim is not going to go out and swing on a rope a few hours later. Clearly, the people working with Batman want him to be an absurdity, someone who is never consistant, a *deux ex machina*. So be it, but this eliminates the possibility of discussing the character rationally. He becomes anything a particular writer or artist wants him to be. He has no past, no continuity, and very little credibility. He has to go on being an avenger, because the kid reader would not be interested in the real life of a man like Bruce Wayne. He wants to see a fantasy creature flying around in the night. He wants those over-developed muscles which in reality inhibit action rather than promote it. Fine. *But don't keep trying to tell us we're dealing with a human being, someone who can suffer just like other men.*

Ted White commented in **ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME** (1970) that Batman was not Bob Kane's idea, but Steranko says he was, that Kane got the nod from DC and called Finger and they collaborated to work out the details of the character. Since Kane drew the strip, he was the one who signed it and Finger was never given a by-line. Finger was born in 1914 and died in 1974. Kane was born in 1916. He is still living. A few years ago he was showing his Batman paintings at The San Diego Comic Convention. ~~John Benson~~ who wrote the entry on Batman for the Maurice Horn **WORLD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE COMICS**, said that Finger was considered "the definitive writer of Batman (250)." Ron Goulart in his **GREAT HISTORY OF COMIC BOOKS** reiterated Steranko's interview with Bill Finger. Feiffer said of Batman: "His lineage--the school of rich idlers who put on masks--dates back to The Scarlet Pimpernel and includes Zorro and the Green Hornet (26). Comparing Batman to Superman, he wrote: "*The Batman school preferred a vulnerable hero to an invulnerable one,* preferred a hero who was able to take punishment and triumph in the end to a hero who took comparatively little punishment, just dished it out (27)." In **SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT** (1953), Fredric Wertham accused Batman and Robin of being a homosexual couple. DC editor E. Nelson Bridwell, introducing the collection of Batman comic stories in **BATMAN FROM THE 30s TO THE 70s,** defended the dynamic duo. Just buddies in the bat cave. Bridwell confirmed that the chief writer on Batman was Finger. "One sure sign of a Finger script was the presence of gigantic working models of everyday objects. They might be outdoor signs or indoor displays, but they were exact replicas of their smaller originals. His giant sewing machines really sewed; his giant phonographs played; and his giant paint tubes were chock full of real paint, ready to squirt in The Joker's face (13)."

The idea of teenaged sidekicks never worked for me. Robin was put into the Batman strip to give Batman someone to talk to. He was the orphaned son of a couple of circus trapeze artists who were killed in a fall. Bruce Wayne took him on as his ward, adopted him, trained him, got him a costume, and we had Robin. Named after Robin Hood. The idea was that kids would identify with Robin, but that wasn't true for me or any of the kids I knew. Hey, we *were* kids. We wanted to be adults. We wanted to be Superman and Batman. Who wanted to be Robin? I can see the dramatic necessity for Wayne to have someone to talk to so he wouldn't have to think all the time, but let's leave it at that. I'm sure today's readers who identify with those stiffly animated superheroes that disgrace kidvid time still reject kid characters. On the other hand, they seem to identify with Ninja Turtles and Gobots and Transformers and other inhuman creatures so what do I know?

So what we have in Batman is a woman's fantasy, developed in comic strip form by uneducated men, expanded and ultimately turned over to educated writers and artists who dressed the character up with psychoanalytic jargon but could not deal with the contradictions that arose in the process. What Batman is now is just another invulnerable superhero in a silly costume. That the recent stories about him have been called adult is a joke. Are violence, brutality, and sado-masochism adult? Not really. The only way for Batman to become adult would be for him to give up his entire fantasy of crime-fighting and accept his wasted life for what it is, childless and lonely. He'd commit suicide if the company would let him.

Joe Brancatelli.